

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****FEMA's FY 2011 Priorities and Beyond:
Aligning Budget, Mission, and Vision***

April 27, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Communication, Preparedness, and Response Subcommittee hearing entitled “FEMA’s FY 2011 Priorities and Beyond: Aligning Budget, Mission, and Vision”:

“Let me thank Administrator Fugate for being with us today to testify on FEMA’s Fiscal Year 2011 Budget priorities and beyond.

You bring a wealth of on-the-ground emergency management experience to FEMA, which is critically important to understanding the needs of first responders and communities.

Let me also add that there are many demands on FEMA’s scarce resources. Many of these demands can be matters of life and death to Americans who live in every corner of the country.

On Saturday, I saw first-hand the devastation caused by the weekend’s string of tornadoes. Scores of my constituents will need the help of your agency, and I look forward to your leadership.

I believe this budget request reflects your vast experience and I was pleased to see that FEMA received a more than two percent increase in net discretionary spending.

With roughly \$10.5 billion in total budget authority, FEMA should be able to adequately carry out its mission.

I was particularly pleased to see the \$23 million request for regional facility construction. I know these funds will help you carry out your vision for empowering the Regions.

However, these new facilities will provide little benefit, if FEMA does not have strong policies in place or adequate staff with the right expertise.

Last month, I was dismayed to learn that FEMA still does not have a robust Five-Year Human Capital Plan. I urge you to complete that strategic plan and send it to the Committee as soon as possible.

Despite the overall increase to FEMA’s budget, I do have serious concerns about several vital programs.

Like the Chairwoman, I am concerned about cuts to the firefighter grants and the consolidation of several free-standing grants into the State Homeland Security Grant Program.

I am also alarmed by the 14% cut to the Urban Search and Rescue Program (USAR). We saw several USAR teams perform heroically in Haiti and they deserve our nation’s support.

In addition to the request, the Administration is asking for \$5.1 billion in supplemental funding for the Disaster Relief Fund.

These monies will be used to fund previous disasters, including very valuable arbitration claims from Hurricane Katrina and I urge the Senate to move quickly to restore these vital funds. H.R. 4899 was passed by the House before the Easter recess.

While these funds are needed, I am disturbed by a recent OIG report, which found roughly \$16 billion in unspent monies sitting idle with FEMA, because it has failed to close-out nearly 800 disasters since 1989.

Funds not needed for open disasters could be deobligated and made available for use in other disaster relief activities, like better temporary housing.

As you well know, I am very troubled by the way FEMA and GSA have handled the disposal of more than 100,000 temporary housing units used during the 2005 hurricane season.

Dumping tens of thousands of trailers plagued with health concerns, in an already depressed market, is simply irresponsible.

Because of these serious health concerns, I have called on the Department of Justice to intervene, and protect our citizens from the sale of these trailers.

Another OIG report was highly critical of FEMA's disaster relief contracting, finding insufficient attention to costs and competition.

FEMA must do a better job with its contracting and look for ways to open competition, particularly to small and minority-owned businesses.

The \$3.9 million housing contract in American Samoa for eight homes is a prime example of FEMA's procurement problems and I look forward to working with the Chairwoman to find a better solution.

Mr. Administrator, as you know, your vision for FEMA is just as important as the dollars requested.

Your "Administrator's Intent" memo is a good first step, but we must see action behind those words. I urge you to address the concerns I raised as you implement your vision."

#

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Dena Graziano or Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://homeland.house.gov>